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**Democracy and Human Rights**

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**Statement before the  
Committee on International Relations  
Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Human Rights  
House of Representatives  
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Chairman Gallegly and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the work of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in building democracy and promoting good governance and human rights.

I congratulate Assistant Secretary Craner and his colleagues at the State Department for producing again this year a superb compendium of the U.S. government's efforts to promote democracy and human rights abroad. "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2003-2004" reviews the efforts of dedicated U.S. government officials, at many levels, within the Department of State, the Agency for International Development, and other U.S. agencies, working over the past year to build democratic institutions that will protect freedom and human rights.

USAID supports transitions to democracy and promotes human rights as a core element of our development mandate. In recent years a global consensus has emerged that development is not only dependent on good governance, but that good governance is part and parcel of successful development. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated that, "governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development." The only form of governance that we have found to be well-suited to development, security and long-term stability is democratic governance.

That finding is strongly reinforced in USAID's 2002 publication, "Foreign Aid in the National Interest," which sets forth categorically that, "promoting democratic governance is vital to the national security of the U.S. and must be a central objective of any development program." Stable democratic nations are less likely to go to war against us, our allies or against each other. Nations operating under democratic systems are less likely to dissolve into the anarchy which breeds terror and are more likely to support free markets and international trade. Democratic nations are more likely to cooperate with the United States in meeting the challenges of the 21st century, such as disease, narcotics, hunger, trafficking in persons, and the threatened environment.

USAID is proud of its accomplishments in supporting human rights and transitions to democracy as part of the U.S. government's overall effort. Although these accomplishments seldom attract headlines they are nonetheless vital successes of U.S. foreign policy. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to provide you some examples of USAID's past and recent efforts to promote democracy and human rights.

USAID was a pioneer within the international development community in putting democracy and human rights at the forefront of the development agenda. Since the early 1980s, USAID has provided technical assistance and advice to reformers to support properly functioning democratic governments whose leaders are chosen by popular vote, whose criminal codes are modernized to protect citizens, and where the culture of impunity has been challenged and is being replaced by a culture of accountability.

Our democracy and human rights programs, born amid the political turbulence of Latin America in the 1980s, are now two decades old. One need only recall Central America in the 1980s, a region consumed by civil war and

suffering under repressive autocracies to see the progress that has been made.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, when first eastern Europe and then the Soviet Union abandoned communism, USAID was among the first to assist a new generation of leaders with the establishment of new democratic institutions, new laws, independent judiciaries, free press, and political competition that was more free and more fair. Today Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, whose democracies all benefited from substantial USAID assistance over the years, are successful democratic nations that have recently gained membership in the European Union.

Accomplishments in Africa in past years are no less important, though the challenges there remain tremendous. Only ten years ago, South Africa embarked on a transition from institutionalized inequality, racial discrimination and fundamental violations of human rights to democracy. USAID played a vital role supporting the new government and civil society organizations in South Africa as they created a new social contract based on equal rights and the profoundly democratic principle of "one person one vote." USAID assistance in Mozambique has been equally critical, supporting electoral and political party reform and modernization of the justice sector and ultimately bringing a measure of stability to a country that had been at war with itself for a generation.

The United States remains the world's foremost proponent of democratic development and a leading promoter of good governance and human rights and USAID continues to extend robust support to democratic reformers and institutions. USAID's democracy budget in FY 2004 will approach \$1 billion, including Development Assistance, Economic Support Funds, and other accounts. That budget supports democracy, good governance and human rights in nearly 100 countries throughout the world.

The promotion of democratic transitions and human rights faces many new challenges, particularly in consolidating nascent democracies, fighting corruption, and addressing the post-Cold War phenomenon of fragile and failing states. President Bush noted in his preface to the 2002 National Strategy of the United States that the greatest threat to the United States today does not come from strong, hostile states, but from dysfunctional, lawless and weak states. Accordingly, USAID is examining how best to transform fragile states into capable national governments functioning under the rule of law. A few examples will help explain the challenges and opportunities.

In Iraq, America faces perhaps its greatest challenge. Among the justifications for regime change in Iraq was to liberate the Iraqi people from one of the most brutal tyrannies in recent history, and replace it with a modern democratic state. That goal remains central. While the detailed structure of that system will be identified through the drafting of the Iraqi Constitution in the coming months, a solid foundation for that work has been laid by USAID's local governance and community action programs.

Early in the campaign to reconstruct Iraq, USAID's initial task was to support local governments and build their capacity to deliver essential services throughout the country. Today, across Iraq, widespread efforts are laying the foundation for a more representative government that respects the rights of individuals - whether they are Sunni, Shi'ia, Kurds, Assyrians, or Turkomans - and will enable greater Iraqi participation in the political process. USAID has helped to establish local governance programs in each of Iraq's 18 governorates and is building the capacity and skills of local government officials and public servants to manage resources effectively, to establish priorities based upon the needs of constituents, and to work with citizen groups to promote active participation. USAID is also actively engaged in a civic education program, having conducted more than 7,000 sessions with broad cross-sections of Iraqi society to discuss the principles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and government in a democratic system.

Every major aspect of our Iraq program considers the needs and capabilities of women—in education, employment, health, agriculture, and political life. In addition, we have specific programs addressing women's issues. We are creating women's centers in all nine districts that will serve as training centers and meeting places to empower women.

As Iraq embraces its new sovereignty, the USAID effort to promote democracy and human rights continues and broadens. In consultation with other U.S. agencies, USAID is developing programs to establish a modern justice sector, further support civil society, and prepare for the 2005 election process. The security environment remains highly fluid. The 110 USAID staff working on the ground in Iraq demonstrates significant commitment and courage. Our Iraqi partners, aware of these risks, remain committed to the democratization of their country, and USAID will continue to support them in their pursuit of this goal.

The re-building of Afghanistan after generations of war is one of the most important challenges we face today. Once

the home of the Taliban and of Al Qaeda, Afghanistan is making progress toward constitutional democracy, with unprecedented legal acknowledgement of human rights, and the rule of law. Last year, USAID developed and managed the operational planning and logistical support for the Constitutional Loya Jirga on behalf of the United Nations and the Constitutional Commission. USAID has built or refurbished courthouses in two provinces to date, and is in the process of building or refurbishing judicial facilities in five additional provinces. By the end of 2004, USAID will have built or rehabilitated 16 judicial facilities in seven provinces, which will house the institutions of law and promote a culture that respects law and human rights.

USAID continues to provide technical assistance and training in Afghanistan to the Constitutional, Judicial and Human Rights Commissions, as well as the President's Office and other institutions. USAID is working with the electoral authorities to ensure a successful national election later this year. USAID staff, contractors and grantees are working with political party and civic leaders on domestic election monitoring, as well as conducting a civic education campaign to promote popular political participation.

In Sudan, USAID began raising the alarm about Darfur only months after the onset of the crisis. USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios accompanied Secretary Powell to the region; this was his second trip to the region in the last few months. USAID has been active in promoting accountability for the severe human rights abuses there. USAID recently collaborated with nongovernmental organizations and the State Department, both DRL and INR, to develop a questionnaire that will be used in the collection of information. The first phase of the Darfur War Crimes Documentation Project is being funded by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives. It is USAID's flexible funding mechanism that is allowing that project to be implemented quickly.

In southern Sudan, we stand at the brink of an historic breakthrough. Africa's longest raging civil war, one which has caused some 2.5 million deaths, more than 4 million internally displaced, and more than 300,000 refugees, may be coming to an end. The people of southern Sudan as well as the international community are already looking to USAID to step forward to aid in the stabilization and reconstruction of southern Sudan, including supporting basic governance institutions. It is an exciting yet daunting challenge given that large sections of southern Sudan, abandoned or destroyed by war, have experienced virtually no formal government in decades. With the signing of the Framework for Peace on May 26th, the moment has arrived to help the people of southern Sudan create a government that is respectful of human rights, politically open, and responsive to the needs of local citizens.

USAID has been working with the authorities of southern Sudan to prepare for this challenge. We will play a significant role in supporting the creation of an open political process, including widespread education about the peace agreement itself, broad ranging support to reconciliation of all southern political and military elements, and a south-wide political convention to make initial decisions on the interim administration. At the grass-roots level, we support civic education through civil society groups, and provide assistance for the development of community-based civil society. We are supporting independent media outlets, including an independent radio station serving southern Sudan. In anticipation of the peace agreement, USAID is developing organizational designs for the future state ministries, beginning with the Ministry of Education.

USAID is also supporting community-based reintegration of returned abductees in receiving communities of southern Sudan. The program supports the development of committees to ensure that returning abductees have quality interim care as they re-enter community life. In addition, the program seeks to improve child protection in southern Sudan to address issues of abuse, exploitation, family separation, and neglect, among others. The program works with southern Sudanese to identify, document, and develop community strategies to improve child protection. We are participating in the United Nations' planning for disarmament, demobilization, and re-integration of soldiers, which will include child combatants.

USAID also supports development of the judiciary and the South Sudan Law Society. Activities include funding the South Sudan Law Society's community-based human rights monitoring activities, where the Society trains and supports local human rights commissions created by people-to-people peace agreements. In conjunction with the judiciary, USAID supports the expansion of access to dispute resolution mechanisms by supporting itinerate courts in conflict areas and paralegal (i.e. certified arbiters) training. We support the drafting, dissemination, and training on new law through assistance to the Secretariat of Constitutional and Legal Affairs.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is gradually finding its way on a clear if unsteady path to stabilization. USAID is providing assistance for what will be a difficult transformation from conflict to durable peace and democratic governance. USAID helped establish an Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), and continues to provide technical assistance and training to the IEC and to the political parties that were warring belligerents only two years ago. The USAID Mission in the DRC supports transitional justice institutions and nongovernmental organizations to protect human rights and promote access to justice. USAID provides technical assistance and

training in conflict mitigation for citizens to rebuild their communities while reintegrating ex-combatants and displaced persons. USAID is currently assisting with the drafting and implementation of a legal framework for elections, a representative political process and political party system. While uncertainty remains, the DRC is making a bid for democracy and stability with USAID help.

One of USAID's objectives in Georgia is to help develop more transparent, accountable and responsive democratic governance. USAID will continue its decentralization activity and support to local governments to strengthen their capacity to manage resources, respond to citizens' concerns, and improve service delivery. USAID supports greater integrity and competency in the judicial process, through assistance to the judiciary and to lawyers. USAID assistance to legal aid clinics supports citizens in exercising their rights, including against corrupt practices. The USAID Mission's rule of law program recently produced televised documentaries on human rights, one of which led the government to close pretrial armed forces' detention camps on the grounds that they grossly violated human rights.

Through USAID assistance on the administrative code, Georgia now has Freedom of Information legislation which is frequently used by citizens to force transparency in government. Every sector of USAID's assistance focuses on countering corruption in Georgia – increasing transparency, accountability, prevention, enforcement, and education - and the USAID Mission supports civil society efforts to monitor and provide outreach on corruption issues. In light of recent political openings in Georgia, USAID will also soon initiate a program to work with the Georgian Parliament to strengthen legislative processes.

In August 2002, USAID established a new program in Venezuela to strengthen the country's fragile democratic institutions and promote a peaceful, democratic, and constitutional resolution to the current political crisis in Venezuela. The USAID effort has three objectives: to create political space for dialog between competing political interests, ensure free and open political competition in the electoral process, and build a national agenda that will draw Venezuelans together, reduce tension and help deter violence. We are supporting numerous nonpartisan, local nongovernmental organizations, training and developing a network of domestic election monitors, and promoting independent media agencies in their efforts to work through the crisis.

USAID works closely with the State Department and other government agencies on these matters, and is assisted and supported by numerous American, international and local nongovernmental organizations in each host country. Many other bilateral and multilateral donors and international organizations contribute to this global effort as well. Ultimately the fate of peoples and nations is in their own hands. The triumph of democracy, the protection of human rights, and the preservation of dignity must be the achievement of people and their states. The task of USAID and its partners is to support them in their efforts.

Drawing lessons from these country-level initiatives, USAID has also taken several steps to expand its response to human rights concerns, the nexus between governance and food insecurity and corruption. We have recently initiated what we believe are several innovative programs.

In August 2003, USAID established the Abuse Prevention and Protection Team (APPT) to offer rapid, short-term, flexible assistance in response to widespread abuses during pivotal periods, such as in the immediate humanitarian response to conflict, in the transition towards development and stability, and where appropriate, before a conflict emerges. This initiative means that, in addition to human rights promotion, USAID seeks to foster practical protection solutions to highly vulnerable populations. The APPT is small and experimental at this early stage. It is located in the Office of Transitional Initiatives which has been noted for its rapid and effective field interventions. To date, the APPT has been active in Iraq, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Haiti, and is part of the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) on the ground in Sudan.

As part of our efforts to develop more effective responses to humanitarian emergency famine – the most extreme manifestation of food insecurity – USAID initiated the "governance and food security project." This project is predicated on the observation that governance is often as responsible – if not more responsible – than economic, climatic or agricultural problems in creating the conditions that perpetuate food insecurity. Famines are frequently closely correlated with conflict, suggesting that climatic shocks such as drought or flood are sometimes trigger events, rather than the root causes. Food insecurity is tied to poverty and vulnerability, which can be traced in large part to economic mismanagement and ineffective state institutions. Governments that lack accountability are less likely to be responsive to the needs and demands of the population, including the demand for food and other basic needs. USAID has designed and is field-testing an assessment framework that identifies how governance impacts food security problems. The first case study was completed in Nicaragua in May 2004.

USAID's Democracy Office has recently developed a new international Anti-corruption Strategy. This strategy will

take us beyond the successes we have had in addressing administrative and lower-level corruption. When fully integrated, it will confront the grand corruption of entrenched elites, attack political corruption, and develop approaches to challenge both predatory states and those captured by powerful interests. Continued success will require engaging with our embassies and others in high-level policy dialogue and diplomatic efforts. The strategy promotes cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches and encourages staff in health, education, environment, agriculture and economic growth, in addition to working specifically on democracy and human rights programs, to address explicitly anti-corruption in all Agency programs. It also asks USAID to improve its understanding of the problem through evaluation and research and to continue to model the highest standards of integrity both in its internal operations and in the field through its partners. This strategy builds on the early leadership efforts of USAID in fighting corruption but demands greater and more sophisticated efforts of us as we rise to the serious challenge which corruption poses.

The struggle for democracy and human rights has been long and fruitful, and perhaps as challenging as the war on terrorism. Presidents Wilson and Roosevelt were early leaders in the struggle for democracy, good governance and human rights. We have fought and won many battles in this struggle, the greatest being the victory over communism. The struggle is not over.

We feel that now is precisely the time to reaffirm our commitment to democracy and human rights in the world and to augment and strengthen our programs and reinforce the message that the United States remains the world's champion of democracy and human rights. Without the leadership we provide, alternative concepts of governance will likely emerge to challenge the world's democracies.

I greatly appreciate the support of the Congress in our efforts to address these important democracy and human rights challenges abroad and look forward to continuing this collaboration.